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ABSTRACT

In light of the political and economic transition currently facing the Republic of Korea (ROK), this paper investigates the history of press freedom in that country, in connection with economic growth and political history. The paper examines: (1) the development of newspapers in South Korea; (2) the role of the press in the early years of the republic; (3) the legacy and impact of President Park Chung Hee on the ROK's economic and social development; (4) the continuation of the dictatorship after Park by President Chun Doo Hwan; and (5) the new liberalization under President Roh Tae Woo. The paper concludes that the Korean press (functioning in a traditionally authoritarian society), in spite of years of press censorship and government control interspersed with brief periods of occasional liberalization, is not reluctant to be open and critical, and is willing to tackle taboo subjects. Eighty-three references conclude the paper. (SR)

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PRESS FREEDOM AND SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROGRESS IN THE FAR EAST: THE CASE OF SOUTH KOREA

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Paper presented as part of an invited panel on press freedom and social and economic progress in the Far East at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, International Division, July 1988.

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PRESS FREEDOM AND SOCIAL ECONOMIC PROGRESS IN EAST ASIA: THE CASE OF SOUTH KOREA

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The Republic of Korea (ROK) is one of several newly industrializing countries (NIC's) in the Far East, which, along with Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, is frequently referred to as one of East Asia'S "four tigers," "four dragons," or "little Japans" because of its rapid economic growth. Communication researchers of an earlier generation believed, perhaps somewhat naively, that economic growth would lead to democratic development, and mass communication could play a role in spurring both economic and political development (hereon referred to as social development) (de Sola Pool, 1963).

This paper will examine the relationship between economic growth and social progress, with a special focus on the role of press freedom in spurring economic and social progress in one of the four tigers, the ROK. The ROK, among Asia's NIC's, deserves special attention because it has recently emerged from the pack as an economic leader, choosing the path of the "Japanese model" of economic development by developing its heavy industries, such as steel and automobiles, and gambling on an export-driven economic future. The other NIC's, for the most part, have chosen to pursue their economic futures through the development of light industries. This decision by the ROK's leadership to stake its future on heavy industrial development has implications for the ROK's social development. Rapid development through heavy industries can be ugly and involve the

exploitation of people. The development of heavy industries for a NIC requires a large labor force willing to endure long work hours for low pay.

In terms of social development, for many years the ROK stood an example contrary to the traditional development model where economic development was thought to spur social development. In fact, the ROK seemed to grow more autocratic as its "economic miracle" progressed. Today, the ROK may be at a turning point. Its citizens are demanding greater personal freedom. Social development in the ROK has been hindered because, as so many observers have noted, years of dictatorial rule have created an "authoritarian structure" with the outside "trappings of democracy" (Harrison, 1987, p. 158). This structure is supported by the police, the courts, the military and -- most important of all -- a contrived electoral system that keeps the ruling party in power (Salwen, 1988).

The ROK successfully held its first direct presidential election since 1971 during December 1987. Power was successfully transferred from President Chun Doo Hwan, who ruled with an iron fist since he came to power in a coup, to Roh Tae Woo. Roh, a former general close to Chun, was hand-selected by Chun to succeed him as the candidate of the ruling Democratic Justice Party (DJM) in a free presidential election. On April 13, 1987, Chun broke his promise to hold an election. He abruptly announced that all negotiations toward democratic reform would be suspended until after the 1988 summer Olympic Games. Chun's decision meant Roh would have to be selected through the electoral college, a contrived electoral system controlled by the ruling party that was almost sure to nominate Roh. The suspension of the election and full democratic reforms until after the Olympic Games meant that the new leader selected by the college would have a mandate to rule until 1995.

Protests erupted throughout the ROK. At first only students participated. But soon the nation's middle class -- the backbone of the much touted "economic miracle" -- joined the protests. To Chun's embarrassment, scenes of workers and even businessmen, some still in their suits and ties, demonstrating against the government were broadcast throughout the world. Police clad riot-gear responded to the demonstrations with teargas. Chun hinted that he might call out the military and declare martial law.

Chun's threats, however, were a dangerous game of brinkmanship, and the government yielded. In late June, Roh unexpectedly announced that he was yielding to many of the opposition's demands. He called for direct elections in which he would run as the DJP candidate. He also called for increased press freedom, and revision and possible repeal of a notorious law feared and hated by most of the nation's journalism establishment -- the Basic Press Law:

> (F)or the promotion of the freedom of the press, relevant systems and practices must be drastically changed. However good its intention may be, the Basic Press Law, which has been the target of criticism by most journalists, needs drastic revision or repeal as early as possible. . . . The government cannot and must not attempt to control the press. The press must not be restricted unless it threatens national security. Let's be reminded that only an independent judiciary and the people only judge the press (1987, text of Roh's speech).

Two days later Chun appeared on national televsion and agreed with Roh on all points (Anon., 1987a). Two weeks earlier Chun talked tough: "Under no circumstances must we tolerate illegal activities, violence and demagogy. Such acts will be resolutely dealt with." Now Chun was conciliatory: "I believe that everyone -- the students who have participated in demonstrations, the policemen who have helped quell them,

the citizens who have been tormented by teargas -- has the same desire to defend and promote democracy" (Walkon, 1987, p. 20).

The citizens of the ROK are now enjoying considerable freedom compared to the recent past. Nevertheless, the volatile history of the ROK in the past 40 years cautions against a hasty conclusion that the ROK will evolve into a full-scale, Western-style democracy. For one thing, the building blocks of the authoritarian structure created by the nation's dictators over the years remain in place. For another, the ROK is not a Western nation, and whatever form of democracy it evolves -- if democracy evolves -- will have its own character. For yet another, the military remains strong and leery of the "excesses of democracy." Finally, the ROK, with its Confucian tradition, remains susceptible to the "idiosyncracies of the man at the helm" (Nam, 1980, p. 259).

In connection with the transitional period currently facing the ROK, this study will investigate the state of press freedom in the ROK, from where it has been to predictions of where it is going. As has already been mentioned, communication scholars from an earlier generation believed the mass media could play an important role in communicating economic and social development in developing countries. As a result, this study will examine (1) the development of newspapers in the ROK, (2) the role of the press in the early years of the republic, (3) the legacy and impact of Park Chung Hee on the ROK's economic and social development, (4) and the continuation of the dictatorship after Park by Chun Doo Hwan. After this background is discussed to give the reader a broad historical perspective on the development of press freedom in the ROK, some predictions concerning the future of the ROK's social and economic progress will be made.

Newspapers in the ROK

It has been observed that Korea's Confucian doctrine, the official doctrine of Korea's last dynasty (the Yi Dynasty, 1392-1910), has been influential in promoting the ROK's experience with strongman rule (Han 1976-1977; Wang, 1946; Smith, 1987). Under Confucianism, the ruler's relationship with the people is a familial one, with a powerful but benevolent, paternalistic leader to guide the people. Above all, Confucianism values harmony and unity in the governmental-family system. Unfortunately, democracy rarely involves harmony or unity. Confucianism, though benign in nature, has been a useful doctrine for Korea's leaders to justify authoritarian rule.

According to Choe (1982), a journalism scholar at South Korea's Yonsei University, Korea has a long history of press freedom, which he compared to the "libertarian" concept of the press in the West (see Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956). Even in the 16th century, public criticism of the king was legally sanctioned and communicated through public letters. Choe conceded, however, that in accordance with Confucian tradition only the elite could take advantage of this freedom.

Though Choe contended that Korea has a long press tradition, nothing even resembling a modern-day newspaper for the general public emerged in Korea until the late 19th century. Korea developed metal movable type two centuries before Gutenberg in the West. But the using this invention to reach the public was never considered (Kim, 1965; Oh & Won, 1976). Newsletters, such as the Royal Court Report, were only available to the literati (Lent, 1974, p. 126). Korea's popular news media are WesteRn developments, introduced into the country through Western missionaries and the Japanese, who learned of newspapers through Westerners. The Japanese

introduced the first newspaper into Korea In December 1881, the Chosen Shinpo (Altman, 1984). The first newspaper expressing a uniquely Korean view, Hansong Sunbo, was published by the government's newly created Office of Culture and Information in 1883 (Lee, 1986). Not until 1896 was a Korean newspaper, Tongnip SHinmun, published by private individuals who critically reported on Korean affairs (Kim, 1971, pp. 88-89). Also in 1896, Syngman Rhee, who was later to become the ROK's first president, published Korea's first daily newspaper, Maiyil Shinmun (Rowland, 1958).

The most important aspect of the development of the Korean press is that it established its reputation during the early 20th century under Japanese subjugation. The press led the call for independence and nationalism. Had the Korean press not developed during this period, given its reputation as an outlet for the nation's elite, its possible that its influence upon the ROK during later years might have been quite different. Japanese subjugation of the Korean peninsula began after the signing of the Portsmouth Treaty between Japan and Russia after Russia's defeat in 1905. Formal annexation of Korea occurred in 1910. Japan's control over Korea did not end until Japan's defeat in the Second World War. Stories of the Korean press' role in defying Japanese rule are legion in Korean history (Kim, 1965; Chong, 1980, 1984; Hahn, 1975; 1984; Oh & Won, 1976). As Merrill (1959, p. 260) wrote of the Korean press during Japanese subjugation: "It might be said that the early Korean press in its revolutionary tendencies could be compared to the American press of the 18th century."

In 1905, the Taehan Maeil Sinbo placed a sign over its office declaring "No Entry to Japanese" and detailed numerous accounts of Japanese aggression (Lee, 1984, pp. 329-331; Chong, 1980, pp. 59-114). Since the paper was controlled by an Englishman, and Japan and England were allies,

the paper was able to defy Japanese censorship. The Japanese complained to the British consular. As a result, the editor-publisher of the Maeil Sinbo was forced to sever his connections with the newspaper (Chong, 1984, pp. 39-44).

Another well-known incident involved Son Gi-jong, a Korean who won a marathon during the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. A photograph of Son on the podium with the Japanese flag on his uniform was air-transported by the Japanese for use in the Dong-A Ilbo. The Dong-A published the photograph with the flag brushed out. Sixteen Dong-A staffers were subsequently jailed for 40 days. These and other defiant acts by the Korean press reportedly led Ito Hirobumi, the first Japanese resident general of Korea, to remark that a single word in a Korean newspaper carried more power than a hundred of his own words (Lee, 1984, pp. 330-331). On the eve of the Pacific War, Japan eliminated all newspapers in Korea, with the exception of the Japanese government organ.

The Early Days of the ROK'S Press

Early American press scholars placed a great deal of hope on the Korean press. The Korean press' role under Japanese rule led many American press scholars to suggest that the press of the newly established Republic would enjoy considerable freedom (Ellard, 1957; Merrill, 1959; Oliver, 1957; Rowland, 1958). But probably more important than Korea's struggle with the Japanese, from the American point of view, was South Korea's fight, with the help of United Nations' forces, against communism. It was assumed that anti-communism was synonymous with democracy.

Ellard (1957) wrote that "Korea -- in my opinion at least -- is the only country in the Orient not only ready for democracy but wanting it.

Korea is the best ideological beachhead in the Far East for Occidental concepts of the closest approach to liberty in the world" (p. 59). Ellard and other American press scholars were aware of President Rhee's authoritarian actions. Ellard criticized Rhee's "goons" for their attacks on a newspaper after the newspaper criticized Rhee's policy of requiring young girls to march through the streets chanting "Down with Communists!" The newspaper, Ellard wrote, felt that young girls should stay home and study. Nevertheless, Ellard and other scholars maintained that such incidents were merely the growing pains of a developing nation.

After Rhee closed down the prestigious Dong-A Ilbo for 30 days for criticizing Rhee's policies, Rowland (1958), like other scholars, viewed this incident as an anomaly: "The government seems to have learned to accept and profit by criticism from the press, while the press has become a more mature critic" (p. 452). Rowland also pointed to the lack of newsprint and other resources requiring, and even justifying, in his opinion, the registration (licensing) of newspapers. Rowland wrote that Rhee "is embarrassed by the necessity for restricting the number of newspapers" (p. 452, emphasis added). Oliver (1957) echoed American scholars' hopes for the First Republic: "'Free' is an entirely accurate term for South Korean newspapers -- although 'unrestrained' might be better . . . . As time goes on and experience is gained, Korean newspapers may improve greatly in maturity and accuracy. But they can never be more free than they are today" (pp. 85-86).

The U.S. Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) sought, without success, to impose Western-style press freedom in the ROK. In 1945, 68 newspapers, many of them communist-run newspapers, were published. In 1946, in the face of increasing social unrest, the USAMGIK promulgated Ordinance No. 88, which provided for the registration (i.e., licensing) of

newspapers. Even after the Republic was formed in 1948 and the American military government was dismantled and most communists went to the DPRK, Rhee continued the promulgation of Ordinance 88. The ordinance was not abolished until Rhee was forced to resign under the pressure of student uprisings in April 1960 (Korea Annual, 1985, pp. 196-197).

President Park Chung Hee, who ruled the ROK from the time of his military coup in 1961 to his assassination in 1979, made a lasting impression on the ROK. His impact on ROK's economic and social development endured long after his death. Park's impact can be attributed to his relentless drive to modernize the ROK. He would let nothing get in the way of his grandiose plans, including civil liberties or a critical press.

Rhee's downfall was widely interpreted as a triumph for democracy. Since the press contributed to Rhee's downfall, the press' prestige, which was already considerable because of its defiance during the years of Japanese subjugation, was further enhanced. A parliamentary system was established under the leadership of Premier Myun John Chang. Under Chang's brief rule, Koreans enjoyed new-found freedoms. Almost anyone could start a newspaper. The number of newspapers increased from 41 to 131; the number of news agencies increased from 14 to 276 (Nam, 1978a, p. 109). With the sudden emergence of press freedom after years of restriction, many individuals took advantage of the situation to call themselves "publishers" who were, in effect, extortionists who sought bribes to withhold publishing embarrasing information:

> It was said that one could become a "publisher" of a newspaper for only 2000 won (about $1.50 United States), 1000 won to register with the authorities, another 1000 to have personal name cards printed. On the strength of such identification papers and name cards, all self-furnished, so-called "publishers" showed up at the Ministry of Transportation and demanded first class train tickets

as a token of respect due a "publisher." Or, in the Ministry of Communications, free installations of telephones were demanded (Lent, 1974, p. 118).

Park Chung Hee and the Cult of Modernity

Many of the newly established newspapers never had time to publish a single issue before the May 16, 1961, military coup led by Gen. Park Chung Hee. Park and the generals believed that the limits of freedom were stretched too far, especially two days before the coup when demonstrators at a mass rally in Seoul called upon the government to meet with DPRK leaders at Panmunjom. The press reported all sides of this debate. Under the military junta's crackdown, 960 reporters were purged. The initial crackdown on the press enjoyed wide public and even press support because of the reputations earned by "fake" journalists. The number of newspapers fell to 34 and the number of news agencies to six. Martial law was repeatedly invoked during the 1960's. Outright censorship was imposed and reporters were jailed through the enforcement of vaguely worded "anti-communist" laws, which made it a crime to even report "anti-state" rallies (Nam 1978a, p. 44).

Park knew that he could not successfully rule by force indefinitely. He needed popular support to carry out his modernization plans. He implemented popular programs for economic reform, including a much publicized rural reform program that brought urban amenities to the rural areas. He also initiated the nation's export-oriented economy. In this regard, Park's economic policies were in sharp contrast to Rhee's protectionist policies. Park's economic successes brought tangible improvements in people's standards of living (Han, 1974). The junta drew up a new Constitution in December 1962, permitting direct presidential

elections and a free press. In August 1963, Park was elected president with an electoral plurality of 47 percent.

In a speech before newspapermen in April 1966, Park warned journalists to tread carefully in attacks against the government. He urged journalists to work to achieve modernization and not challenge governmental authority:

> Now is the time for the press to refine this reckless attitude and, through reflection, develop a constructive attitude with which to meet the demands of the new age and the new situation. Now the nation is situated in a grave period, which requires us to unite ourselves, to help encourage and support each other, so that we can achieve the two greatest national tasks of modernization and reunification (quoted in Bum Shin Shik, 1970, pp. 99-100).

Choe (1982) described Park as one of the early advocates of "developmental journalism," long before the concept was clearly conceptualized.[1] Park envisioned the ROK as a model for Third World development, and journalism would play no small part in Park's plans:

> When modernization was apotheosized as the impending national objective, every possible means mobilized for it tended to be justified. The efficiency of mass media was evaluated highly as instrumental for development, and a new role had to be imposed on Korean journalism in the decades of modernization (Choe, 1982, p. 28).

To accomplish his goals, Park used the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) to conduct extra-legal activities. KCIA agents visited newsrooms and "chatted" with reporters about the day's news and even personally edited news reports (Nam, 1978b). Press censorship was so complete that when the ROK and Japan were involved in a major international dispute after KCIA agents kidnapped opposition leader Kim Dae Jung from a Tokyo hotel room in 1973, the Korean press did not report the kidnapping. Similarly, during the "Koreagate" scandal in 1976, when KCIA agents bribed U.S. legislators and provided them with callgirls, the incident went

unreported in the Korean press even though it made world headlines (Campbell, 1976).

Olsen (1980) compared Korea under Park to a profit-driven conglomerate which he labelled "Korea, Inc." To achieve modernization, Park had to make fundamental changes in Korean society. Under Confucian tradition, physical labor and commercial activities were scorned by an elite ruling class. Under Park, physical labor and business acumen were needed for the modernization of the state. By the mid-1960s "the leadership was under the tutelage of well-trained economists who were willing to sacrifice political liberty to attain stable, planned economic growth" (Olsen, 1980, p. 71). In his book Korea Reborn, Park (1979) emphasized the importance of planned economic growth. He made clear that his economic policies were politically motivated. The ROK, Park believed, was in "competition" with the DPRK:

> I have proposed to North Korea to accept peaceful competition between our free system and theirs to determine which system can give the people a better life. The Republic of Korea is already emerging victorious from this competition and by fully making use of our talent as a people, we should continue to sustain high growth to create in Korea an affluent, highly industrialized society (Park, 1979, p. 91).

Park amended the constitution in 1969 to run for president again. As a result of widespread election fraud, Park's support dwindled in virtually all sectors of society. During late 1971 and early 1972, Park aggregated his power. In the face of U.S.-Sino normalization, Park proclaimed a national emergency and usurped extraordinary powers. Park argued that he needed these powers to deal with the DPRK from a position of strength (Anon., 1972; Kihl, 1973, 1984; Koh, 1974, 1984; Kwak, 1985). In October 1972, Park proclaimed martial law, dissolved the National Assembly, closed all universities, suspended political activities, and imposed strict press

censorship. Within a few days Park put forward a new draft constitution, the Yushin (revitalization) Constitution, which eliminated direct presidential elections.

As Park consolidated his power during the mid-1970's, defying him became increasingly dangerous. In October 1974, the prestigious Dong-A Ilbo defied government pressure and reported anti-government demonstrations and opposition demands. The Dong-A went so far as to post a sign over the newsroom demanding that KCIA agents stay out, reminiscent of the Korean press' defiance of the Japanese censorship. It would have been easy for the government to crack down on the Dong-A. But the Dong-A's prestige forced the government to restrain itself. Park had to satisfy clients in Washington and Tokyo (Hazelhurst, 1975). But defiance was spreading. Two other newspapers joined the Dong-A in reporting formerly taboo subjects.

The KCIA responded by secretly contacting the Dong-A's advertisers. Shortly afterwards, advertising in the Dong-A started to disappear. The Dong-A defiantly sought to resist the pressure. Supporters anonymously purchased small advertisements the size of greeting cards proclaiming their support for the Dong-A. The churches also came to the Dong-A's defense, praising the Dong-A in the pulpits and asking church members to buy the Dong-A. By mid-1975, the Dong-A yielded and ceased reporting anti-government activities. Shortly afterwards, the Dong-A's advertisers returned. (Nam, 1978a; 1978b; Crabbe, 1975). Nam (1978b) described the Dong-A incident as Park's successful "taming" of the ROK's press:

> The press has been tamed. From time to time, for its own purposes, the government may allow newspapers to behave as if they were free. But the whip is there. After each brief government-approved show of liberty, the press can be counted on to return to its cage (p. 45).

Chun Doo Hwan: The Second Taming

Park was assassinated in October 1979 by the chief of the KCIA who thought that Park's abuses were excessive. The details behind the assassination remain a mystery to this day. It was possible to kill Park, but his "authoritarian structure" continued, particularly the firmly entrenched military. Martial law still officially existed during the brief "period of liberalization" after Park's death. It was clear that the military could launch a coup at any time. The post-Park era, under caretaker President Choi Kyu-ha, was marked by an uneasy liberalization. Choi promised a new constitution within a year, and all sides of constitutional reform were debated in the press. But there were limits to this new-found freedom. The late Park and his Yushin Constitution could not be criticized. Opposition leader Kim Dae Jung was no longer a nonentity, but coverage of Kim was restricted. He was identified without the title "Mr." before his name, a practice reserved for criminals (Nam, 1980). Kim could appear in group photographs, but his solo photograph was not permitted. His name could not be reported in headlines, and interviews with him were not permitted (Chapman, 1980). So much was still censored that American and Japanese tourists, referred to as the "rumor wire service," were often milked by Koreans for information about political events in the ROK (Nam, 1980, p. 262).

Chun expanded martial law in May 1980, after the Kwangju uprising, ending the "liberalization" period. At first, the government denied there was an uprising in the southwestern city of Kwangju, blaming the press for spreading "malicious, groundless rumors" (Pearce, 1980). After the government conceded that an uprising occurred, it estimated that 191 people died at Kwangju. Unofficial estimates range from 1,000 to 2,000 (Fallows,

1987). The uprising gave Chun an opportunity to blame Kim and the press. Kim was tried for treason and sentenced to death on dubious charges of fomenting the uprising. Under U.S. pressure, Kim's death sentence was commuted to exile in the United States.[2]

Kim was exiled, but the press had to bear the government's fury. In July, the Ministry of Culture and Information revoked the registrations of 172 publications, 12 percent of the ROK's periodicals, for "obscenity" and "creating social confusion" (Harvey, 1984, pp. 2-3). Each province was limited to only one newspaper, requiring four newspapers to close (Reditt, 1981). Daily newspapers published in Seoul were prevented from stationing resident correspondents in the provinces and provincial dailies were not permitted to station full-time correspondents in Seoul. Yonhap, the government news agency, served the Korean news media as the sole domestic news agency to distribute foreign news to its Korean subscribers. It Yonhap also collects news at home and abroad on its own, stationing correspondents in major locations around the world and in Korea's provinces. The Korean Newspaper Association was abolished for "having been a factor in creating moral unrest" (Nam, 1980, p. 266). Chun demanded that 700 journalists from 40 newspapers and broadcast stations be purged. The government placed the burden of "press purification" on the press itself. The government provided five guidelines for determining which journalists should be purged, including those: (1) who were not sufficiently anti-communist, (2) who protested against censorship of the Kwangju uprising, (3) who were closely associated with anti-state politicians, (4) who were corrupt, and (5) who faced accusations of corruption (Pearce, 1980, p. 12).

The broadcast media suffered severely during the reorganization. Two independent broadcast stations, the profitable Tongyang Broadcasting Company, owned by the profitable Samsung conglomerate, and Dong-A, a sister

company of the prestigious daily newspaper, were merged into the state-controlled Korea Broadcasting Service (KBS). The government claimed the "reorganization" was necessary to avoid cutthroat competition in the news media. The Christian Broadcasting Service, established by religious groups in 1945, was not affected by the crackdown. It was warned, however, to confine itself to religious matters (Ungar, 1987).

The press purge was part of a larger crackdown on 8,667 government officials. President Choi seemed increasingly unable to govern after the Kwangju uprising, the subsequent demonstrations after the uprising, and the government's crackdown on government agencies and the press. On August 16, 1980, Choi stepped down and within two weeks Chun was elected through the college. Now that he was president, Chun sought to legalize press control. On December 31, 1980, media regulation was codified into law through the Basic Press Act. Article 3 of the Act enumerates individual and social rights that in effect mandate press responsibility:

> 1. The press shall respect dignity and value of human beings and the basic democratic order;
> 2. The press shall perform its public duties by contributing to the formation of democratic public opinions concerning matters of public interest by means of news reports, commentary and other methods;
> 3. The press shall not infringe upon the personal honor or rights of an individual or public morality or social ethics;
> 4. The press shall not encourage or praise violence and other illegal action which disrupt public order (Youm, 1986, p. 675).

The law requires news media organizations to be registered (licensed) by the Ministry of Culture and Information, which may suspend or cancel registration for up to a year for violation of the law. As Youm (1986, p. 678) wrote of this provision: ". . . the Act effectively grants one single governmental office, the MOCI, the power to emasculate or render mute any

publication that MOCI deems to have spoken out against the government." Registrations were issued to organizations demonstrating financial solvency. It was widely believed that "objectionable" material was vaguely defined so publishers, with the financial sword of Damocles swinging over their heads, would err on the side of conservatism when in doubt about what to publish (Anon., 1985).

The New Liberalization

The press purge of 1980 succeeded in intimidating the press into submission. The years 1980-1985 were similar to 1975-1979, when Nam claimed that Park succeeded in "taming" the ROK's press. In 1985, with Kim Dae Jung's triumphant return to the ROK and student and trade union uprisings, there was a belief that the government had to liberalize. After the fall of President Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines to the much vaunted "people power" rebellion, the eyes of Washington and Tokyo turned toward Seoul. Seoul responded with promises of liberalization. Over 100 unofficial and unlicensed publications openly appeared in bookstores and on newsstands. For the most part, the police took no action to restrict these publications. Stories dealing with opposition demands appeared with regularity in the press. A new National Assembly was elected on February 12, 1985. The two leading opposition parties -- nominally led by Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam -- together received 49% of the vote, compared to 35% for the ruling Democratic Justice Party (DJP). Under the contrived electoral system, however, the DJP maintained a working majority. The Assembly convened in mid-May and called for the abolition of the Basic Press Act, a full restoration of press freedom and the reinstatement of journalists purged by Chun during 1980 (Anon., 1985).

Despite the manifest liberalization, the Basic Press Act was still in

effect. An incident that occurred during 1986 made clear that press control was still very real. The underground journal Mahl (Words), a bi-monthly published by the Council for a Democratic Press Movement (CDPM), an association of banned journalists, many of whom were purged during Chun's "reorganization" of the press six years earlier, devoted an entire special issue in September to press guidelines issued by the Ministry of Culture and Information (MOCI). The guidelines, which were enforced from October 19, 1985, to August 8, 1986, instructed the press on how to report controversial political matters. The guidelines were surprisingly specific, citing incidents which could and could not be reported. The guidleines instructed the press on how to report such matters as labelling demonstrators as "communist sympathizers," dealing with torture cases, and reporting U.S. criticisms of the Chun government (Anon., 1987b, 1987c). The guidelines revealed in the Mahl incident pointed to a degree of press control that is rare in the non-communist world, actually instructing the press what it must publish and how it must report certain matters, in addition to what it was restricted from publishing. As the Index on Censorship (Anon., 1987b) reported: "In short, the press is not suppressed but is associated with authorities and incorporated into the instruments of repression. . ." (p. 30). The issues of Mahl were seized, but many had already been distributed and many more were photocopied and passed on.[3]

In December 1986, three months after the publication of the guidelines in Mahl, the police arrested two CDPM officials alleged to have been involved in the publication of the guidelines and a working journalist who purportedly leaked the information about the guidelines to the CDPM (McBeth, 1987a). They were charged with disseminating "groundless rumors," specifically forbidden by the National Security Law. The law states:

> Any person who has benefited anti-state organizations by way of praising, encouraging, or siding with or by other means, the activities of the anti-state organizations, their members or the persons who had been under instruction from such organizations, shall be punished by penal servitude for not more than seven years (Youm, 1988, p. 27).

The guidelines published in Mahl, however, had little to do with national security or foreign relations. Instead, they mostly dealt with politically sensitive and embarrassing topics. For example, the directives instructed editors not to print "damaging" news stories, such as U.S. government criticisms of human rights in the ROK, to minimize coverage of the activities of dissenters and members of the opposition, and to depict anti-government demonstrations in a negative manner and label demonstraters as communist sympathizers.

On June 4, 1987, the Seoul District Criminal Court sentenced two of those arrested in the Mahl case to suspended prison sentences and set aside the charges against the third journalist, as a gesture of "judicial generosity" (McBeth,, 1987c). In finding the defendants guilty of violating the National Security Act, the Court held that the publication of the guidelines was used by North Korea "for propaganda, and thus their actions had harmed the national interest" (Youm, 1988).

Even after Roh called for far-reaching liberalizations in late June, including greater press freedom and the abolishment of the notorious Basic Press Act, the Chun government did not loosen its control of the press. Two months after Chun publicly endorsed Roh's call for greater freedom, two leading monthly magazines, the Shin Dong-A and Wolgan Chosun flatly refused to accede to a government request that they refrain from publishing details of the Park government's kidnapping of Kim Dae Jung in 1973 (Jameson, 1987). In requesting the magazines to voluntarily withhold publishing the

account of the kidnapping, the government argued that the story could harm South Korea's diplomatic relations with Japan. When the magazines balked at the request, the Agency for National Security Planning, formerly the KCIA, stopped the printing of the magazines by entering the magazines' printing facilities and forcibly stopping the presses.

The government's action ballooned into a highly publicized political controversy. The National Assembly publicly condemned the government's action. Roh Tae Woo joined the National Assembly in condemning the action. Although less vigorous in his condemnation, Roh expressed his reservations about the value of press control: "The controversy should be resolved as soon as possible and the publication of Wolgan Chosun and Shin Dong-A should not be delayed any further, and press freedom should be guaranteed for the sake of the national interest" (Park, 1987, p. 375). Eventually the government lifted the eight-day ban, explaining: "The government notes that it is the responsibility of the press as well as the government to protect national interests. It is the position of the government that it is up to the two media involved to determine how to handle the story in question" (Park, 1987, p. 377).

According to the author of the Shin Dong-A story, his magazine had cut "significant parts" from the original article (Jameson, 1987). Nevertheless, the implications of the government's decision to yield to the press cannot be overlooked. The incident marked the first time that the government yielded in a press-government confrontation as a result of a mounting public outcry. Further, the Shin Dong-A and Wolgan Chosun incident marked the second time in several months that the government yielded to public pressure. On June 29, 1981, Roh publicly yielded to street demonstrations to accept democratic reforms and a direct

presidential election. President Chun publicly endorsed Roh's decision a few days later on national television.[4]

THE FUTURE UNDER ROH?

A sign of the new media openness under Roh occurred when former President Chun Doo Hwan's younger brother, Chun Kyung Hwan, fled the country to Japan under a false name in mid-March 1988. Under the Chun government, the younger Chun headed the New Community Movement, a nonpolitical movement started in the 1970s by President Park to modernize the nation's rural areas. An investigation of the financial dealings of the Movement revealed that the younger Chun was involved in large-scale land speculation, attempts to exact money from businessmen and pressure government agencies to divert funds to the Movement. As a result, even though the younger Chun never held political office, he was considered one of the most powerful political figures in South Korean politics during the Chun regime. In contrast to the cover-ups that former scandals received under the Chun regime, the reports of the younger Chun's past activities were widely reported in local newspapers. Newspapers also recounted past scandals under the Chun government (Anon, 1987).

Roh's willingness to bend under public pressure and not follow his predecessors in the press-government relationship has already brought about several healthy changes. For example, Korean newspapers are bothered less often by the MOCI's "requests for cooperation." In addition, the press has recently dealt with once taboo subjects, such as the Kwangju uprising and the December 12, 1979, "mini-coup" that established Chun's authority. There is no denying that the Korean press is enjoying greater freedom than in the past. But is this just another "period of liberalization," as the

ROK has enjoyed several times in the past, only to be followed by a military coup and an autocratic regime?

Roh has been surprisingly willing to let press freedom flourish. In his efforts to put into effect his proposed democratic reforms, Roh and his government have amended the Constitution to embrace greater press freedom which specifically prohibit press censorship: "Licensing or censorship of speech and press, and licensing of assembly and association, shall not be recognized. Further, the Basic Press Act has been substituted with two separate laws -- the Act Governing the Registration of Periodicals and the Act Governing Broadcasting. Compared to the Basic Press Act, the new acts tend to be less restrictive and do not permit the MOCI as much discretionary power as the Basic Press Act over the registration of periodicals. Accordingly, under the new statutes, the cancellation of the registration of a periodical is now permitted only by the judiciary, not by an administrative office such as the MOCI.

CONCLUSION

The years of press censorship and control under Syngman Rhee, Park Chung Hee, and Chun Doo Hwan, interspersed with brief periods of liberalization, have subjugated the Korean press. One might think that after years of subjugation, interspersed with periods of occasional liberalization, the press would be reluctant to be open and critical, even during the present period of liberalization. After all, based on past history, this period could be brief and followed by brutal, authoritarian rule. A daring press now may have to pay for its temerity later. So far, this has not been the case. The ROK's press has tackled serious issues and dealt with formerly taboo subjects.

Roh has to be credited with promoting this upbeat mood in the press. Starting with his declaration of democratic reforms on June 29, 1987, he ushered in a series of populist reforms. We may be witnessing a turning point in the ROK's history. This traditionally authoritarian society may move in a democratic direction.

FOOTNOTES

1. For discussions on developmental journalism, see Hachten (1987, pp. 30-34) and Altschull (1984).

2. See McBeth (1987b) for a thorough account of the Kwangju uprising.

3. For a complete transcript of the guidelines, see Anon. (1986).

4. See McBeth (1987e) for a summary of Roh's 8-point speech.

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